

## Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5809

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PASS LABOR

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, XG

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION ON THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRIES

REF: BRUSSELS 00089; 75 STATE 301380

1. WE OBTAINED THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION FROM THE JOINT LABOR-MANAGEMENT COUNCIL FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRIES ON THE SCHEDULING AND PLANNING OF CONSTRUCTION IN BELGIUM. THERE ARE NO PUBLIC COUNTER-SEASONAL PROGRAMS IN BELGIUM. THIS QUESTION WAS STUDIED IN 1958 AND 1961 BY THE COUNCIL (COPIES OF REPORTS BEING POUCHED) AND WHILE IT CONCLUDED THAT SUCH PROGRAMS MIGHT BE USEFUL, SO FAR NOTHING HAS BEEN DONE TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS. ACCORDING TO THE COUNCIL, THE MAIN RESISTENCE HAS BEEN FROM THE TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES. THIS IS DUE TO THE FACT THAT THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY HAS HAD A PRIVATELY FINANCED SUPPLEMENTARY EMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION PROGRAM SINCE 1948. THERE IS CONSIDERABLE WORKER RESISTANCE TO SPECIAL PROGRAMS IN THE WINTER SEASON SINCE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS ARE ALMOST EQUAL TO WAGES. OTHER FACTORS ARE THE WINTER CLIMATE IN BELGIUM IS NOT AS SEVERE AS IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES, RELATIVELY FEW DAYS ARE LOST BY FREEZING (VARYING BETWEEN 10 AND 30 A YEAR) AND THE COST FOR IMPLEMENTING SPECIAL TECHNIQUES REQUIRED FOR WINTER ALL WEATHER CONSTRUCTION IS STILL HIGH.

2. IN ABSENCE OF ANY PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PROGRAMS TO ENDUCE ALL  
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COUNTER-SEASONAL CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTORS GENERALLY TRY

TO PLAN WORK AND CONSTRUCTION STARTS TO PERMIT INDOOR WORK IN WINTER. THIS IS BORNE OUT IN STATISTICS IN CONSTRUCTION STARTS AND A COUNCIL STUDY OF SEASONAL VARIATION IN HOURS OF WORK. (TABLES GIVING THESE DATA ALSO BEING POUCHED.)

3. GOVERNMENT WHICH ACCOUNTS FOR ABOUT ONE THIRD OF ALL CONSTRUCTION (EITHER BY CONTRACT OR BY SUBSIDY) DOES HAVE VARIOUS MEASURES TO PROMOTE CONTER-CYCLICAL PROGRAMS THIS IS ONE REASON WHY CONSTRUCTION SECTOR IS ONE PART OF ECONOMY LEAST AFFECTED BY CURRENT ECONOMIC RECESSION. MAIN ELEMENTS OF THIS PROGRAM ARE PUBLIC WORKS BUDGET AND SUBSIDIES OFFERED TO LOW AND MEDIUM INCOME FAMILIES FOR BUILDING OWN HOME. LATTER HAVE BEEN INCREASED BY TWO-THIRDS SINCE SEPTEMBER 1974 TO BOOST RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION. LIKEWISE PUBLIC ROADS BUDGET HAS BEEN INCREASED BY OVER 40 PERCENT FROM 1974 TO 1976. (IT WAS ALMOST STATIC FOR PREVIOUS TEN YEAR). FURTHER INFORMATION ON THESE PROGRAMS IS CONTAINED IN DOCUMENTS ALREADY POUCHED AS REPORTED REF B.  
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